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A

DISCOURSE

DELIVERED AT THE

ONE HUNDREDTH ANNIVERSARY

OF THE ORGANIZATION OF THE

FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH

IN NORTH STONINGTON,

SEPTEMBER 20TH, 1843.

WITH AN APPENDIX.

BY ALBERT G. PALMER,
PASTOR OF THE BAPTIST CHURCH, STONINGTON BORO'.

'THE ENTRANCE OF THY WORDS GIVETH LIGHT.' Psalm cxix. 130.

BOSTON:
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May 29. 1890

GEORGE COOLIDGE, PRINTER,
57 Washington Street.

Rev. A. G. Palmer,

Dear Sir:

The First Baptist Church in North Stonington, are happy to express the pleasure they felt in listening to your centennial discourse, delivered on the 20th September, 1843, by request, and through the undersigned ask a copy for publication.

We are yours in the gospel,

Charles Randall,
Reuben Chapman,
Aaron Thompson,
Paul Green,
E. B. Pendleton,
Asher H. Chapman,
} Committee.

North Stonington, *Sept.* 23, 1843.

DISCOURSE.

'GATHER the people together, men, and women, and children, and thy stranger that is within thy gates, that they may hear, and that they may learn and fear the Lord your God; and that their children which have not known anything, may hear and learn to fear the Lord your God.' DEUTERONOMY XXXI. 12, 13.

'THE annals of an oppressed and struggling church,' says a distinguished historian, 'are far more likely to afford events of powerful interest, than those of a dominant hierarchy; for it is in seasons of distress and suffering, of privation, contumely, and persecution, that the loftier passions of our nature are elicited.' It is equally true that in circumstances like these, the strength, dignity, and glory of the *christian character* is most fully developed, and the purity of a true religion most clearly exhibited. Perhaps the world has not witnessed a brighter illustration of these remarks, than the history of the trials, conflicts, and sufferings of our own denomination furnishes, and especially the detailed history of many of our individual churches.

From the slight view we have been able to take of this field, we are convinced that it is rich in all that variety of moral incident, and religious association, which one might desire as an inspiration to his own feelings, as well as to invest its history with interest and importance.

The historical incidents of many of our older churches, are few and scattered; a single record of their orginization, with a few rays of traditionary light, is all that has come down to us from this most interesting period of their existence. Hence, little comparatively can be known of the particular circumstances which gave them birth: of the local influences which called them into being; of the trials, sufferings, conflicts, through which they were called to pass. One thing, however, is certain, that if the early movements of our denomination bear but an *ordinary* relation to those which are more recent; if, as is usually the case, persecution and suffering increase in proportion as we go back to the rise of a sect; then, in the circumstances of our incipient organization, there must have been trials and privations of which we can form but indistinct conceptions.

A distant and general view of these times, based, however, upon correct data respecting the character of affairs in the church, is all that can be obtained. Yet even this, limited as it may seem, will throw much light upon the subject; and if we can succeed in collecting these scattered rays, they may serve as a taper, at least, to guide us along the often obscure path of our early history.

The only record that can be found of the constitution of this church, is as follows: '1743 the First Baptist Church in Stonington was constituted; Mr. Wait Palmer was ordained their watchman the same year.' But of the names and numbers of its original members, of the churches and ministers who composed the council of recognition, we have from the records no information. Indeed there is an entire blank from 1743 to 1762, embracing a period of nineteen years, about which little can be known, save what can be gleaned from tradition, and collateral history. It must be borne in mind, however, that the date which marks the rise of this church, carries us far back into the history of our denomination in this country. Though from the banishment of

Williams, Baptist sentiments had prevailed in Rhode Island, and were gradually making progress in other sections of the country, yet, 'about this time,' says Backus, 'there appears to have been but ten churches in Massachusetts, none in New Hampshire, none in Vermont, and but one in Connecticut.' The First Baptist Church in Groton was constituted as early as 1705; of the immediate circumstances of its origin we have no definite information.

It is, however, worthy of record, that the date of its organization is the same that marked a general combination on the part of the dominant ministry, for an increase of power over the churches.

Not succeeding in Massachusetts, the experiment was made in Connecticut with more success. On the death of the third governor Winthrop in 1707, they succeeded in electing as governor a clergyman favorable to the scheme. This issued in the construction and establishment of a form of discipline, famous in history as the *Saybrook Platform*. Whether the dissatisfaction arising from this usurpation of power by the ministry, in many sections of

the state, had anything to do with the origin of the church in Groton, we have not been able to determine.

Still it is worthy of notice, as illustrating the providence of God, that, at the very time the ministry were seeking to bring to their aid the arm of civil power, in the government of the church, God, upon the very soil where this unholy alliance was being consummated, was raising up for himself a people, before whose influence this *Babel* of iniquity should fall to rise no more.

It is, however, to be inferred, that the increase of this church at first was but slow and gradual. During the space of twenty years it appears to have called into existence no kindred organization; this is indeed somewhat surprising; but the cause we think is to be found chiefly in the peculiar character of the times. The year 1705 places us near to the early settlement of the country; consequently, it may be supposed that the adjoining towns and neighborhoods were but thinly inhabited, and hence the facilities for a wide and rapid diffusion of truth, were but comparatively few. In addition to this, the educational prejudices

of the people were everywhere hostile to the distinguishing sentiments of the Baptists.

The ministry of the prevailing order had succeeded in blending the ecclesiastical and civil administrations; the church had sought and formed an alliance with the state, and this unnatural, unholy connection, as it always has, produced the most unnatural and unholy effects. Intoleration, persecution, fines, imprisonments, whippings, banishments, and death; these are among the dark crimes, which grow immediately out of this illegitimate connection.

Whether the church in Groton felt severely the grasp of this power in the way of direct persecution, we are not able to say. But it is evident, that a body so feeble as this church must have been at that time, could not fail to have been retarded in its progress, by an opposition so powerful as that of the church and state united.

An age that could be induced to sacrifice the great principles of religious freedom, to yield the high prerogative of ecclesiastical administration to a power, from whose tyranny and cruelty it had but just escaped, of all others

would be most unfavorable to those principles of church policy which have ever distinguished the Baptist denomination. Men who can be led away by an ambitious, designing priesthood; men who will not take the trouble, nor feel the responsibility of thinking for themselves, are the very last men to renounce *popular error*, or to embrace *unpopular truth;* in other words, the very last men to become Baptists. And that this was the character of the age which we are contemplating, the history of both church and state, at that period, plainly indicates.

In not a few instances, however, the measure was received with marked disapprobation; and in some cases, met with open and decided resistance. Hence originated a species of dissent, or *separatism*, from the established order. *Separate* churches sprung up in various parts of the country, retaining all the characteristics of the old organization, yet resisting the encroachments of the ministry, repudiating the union of the church and state, and refusing the aid of the civil power in the administration of discipline. As a consequence, there arose a kind of sympathy between the

Baptists and these Separatists, which in some cases resulted in a *species of union*, or *mixed communion;* a state of things most unfavorable to our ecclesiastical purity, and hostile to the advancement of truth. And it is not surprising, that the influence of Baptist churches, consenting to this injudicious connection, was not more widely felt, and their *distinguishing* sentiments no more generally embraced.

In addition to this, the general tone of religious feeling in the prevailing church was exceedingly low; a loose and dark theology everywhere prevailed; the vital doctrines of the gospel were unbelieved, unpreached, and to a great extent unknown. Christianity existed but in *name* and *form*; and the church, so far from being the congregation of the *righteous*, came emphatically to be the congregation of the *unrighteous*, the repository of error, and the highway to death.

An impure morality was substituted for experimental piety; obedience to the ministry and the magistracy, took the place, at least in matters of religious discipline, of obedience to God. Hence a factious, disputatious spirit prevailed. Men were occupied, not in search-

ing for truth, but in settling questions of civil and ecclesiastical policy; in enforcing and resisting an authority, which, on the one hand, was regarded as the safeguard of the church, but, on the other, as illegitimate, profane, and anti-christian. The public mind was hence kept in a state of continued excitability, and the warlike passions of the heart were frequently called out in fierce, unholy collision. Still this state of things, unhappy as it was, was not altogether unserviceable in the cause of truth. Amid these commotions, men began to be enlightened respecting the true character of Christ's kingdom. In resisting what they were forced to regard as a usurpation of authority by the ministry, they fled to the scriptures, and studied the constitution of the church as therein revealed, and were thence, by a process not very difficult to understand, frequently led the entire length of truth, touching the great question, not only of gospel order, but also of gospel ordinances. Hence, in immediate connection with this state of things, Baptist sentiments were found rapidly spreading, especially in those sections where *separatism* prevailed; so much so, that, at

one time, as Backus states, it seemed that all these churches would become Baptists. The church, in her eagerness to bind men to her traditions, had compelled them to adopt the Bible as their only rule of *faith* and *practice*, and in so doing cut the cords of ignorance and superstition, by which she might otherwise doubtless have held them longer in her allegiance. *But so had God ordained.* The time had come when a purer spirit was to go forth upon the earth in the name of christianity; when the inward life of the church was to be rekindled, and her ordinances in their primitive purity restored. For when we once admit that God has spoken to us in his word, and that from its decisions there can be no appeal, conscience will bind the *christian* to all its requirements, whether they regard the internal or external life, the inner sanctuary of the church, or its outward visible forms and ordinances. A *pure christianity within, always secures a pure christianity without, so far as the understanding is enlightened as to its requirements.*

Hence it is an interesting historical fact, that the more general rise of Baptist sentiments in Connecticut, was simultaneous with

that glorious revival, with which many sections of the state were visited in the years 1741, 2, and 3. It is of this revival that Backus says: 'The great change that was then wrought in many minds, was the evident cause of the rapid spread of Baptist principles in our land.' 'The subjects of that work,' he continues, 'embraced two ideas which produced this effect. The first was, that saving faith is necessary to give any soul a true right to communion in the church of God; the second was, that there is no warrant for a half-way covenant therein; and as infants are generally in a state of nature when they are said to be brought into covenant, infant baptism expires before these principles.' So true is it, as a general thing, that the internal and external purity of the church, rise and fall together. Thus the moment men began to apprehend the *great truth*, that living faith in Christ was indispensable to admission into his church, immediately, by a necessary inference they advanced another step, namely, that living faith in Christ was an equally indispensable prerequisite to baptism; and having gone thus far, the more discerning and conscien-

tious were constrained to go still farther, and *renounce infant baptism. For if faith in Christ be the first step towards membership in the visible church, and baptism the second, then, evidently, infants are disqualified for the second, because incapable of the first.* It is not surprising, that, when men began to reason thus, 'infant baptism began to decline.' So true is it, that reason, under the control of a sanctified heart, always extricates us from the labyrinths of error, and guides us along the plain path of scriptural truth.

It was amid circumstances and influences like these, that this church seems to have had its origin. It was called into life, not by party spirit, not by sectarian zeal, but under the genial influence of a glorious revival of religion; and the great principles of truth, which it then embraced, and which from that time it has steadfastly maintained, were elicited under the same benign influence.

During this year, 1743, Baptist sentiments spread with a hitherto unparalleled rapidity. Several new churches were constituted in New England. In New Jersey, Mr. Dickenson, then president of Princeton college, wrote

a pamphlet, to arrest, if possible, the progress of a sentiment which was fast undermining the long established and venerated usages of the prevailing church. But it did not answer the design of its doubtless well meaning author. 'The pamphlet was reviewed by Dr. Gill, an English Baptist, in 1749; and this examination of the subject, caused the light to be more widely diffused.'

Many converts, about this time, were made to Baptist sentiments, who were not gathered into Baptist churches; but, obtaining baptism at the hand of Baptist ministers, remained in the communion of the churches with which they were already connected. This state of things, though at first tolerated, continued, as might have been anticipated, but for a short season. For soon it was discovered, that the new sentiment had made such progress, that it threatened to prevail over the old; and that *baptism*, unless checked, would soon displace *sprinkling*, or affusion, and obtain the exclusive practice of these churches. 'Hence a *fierce* opposition was raised against what was called rebaptizing, which was declared to be a very wicked act.'

The Separate churches had become a mixed multitude, and, as a consequence, disorder, confusion, and strife, succeeded. Councils were called to settle these increasing difficulties; the first of which was held in Exeter, May, 1753, and a larger one, the year following, in Stonington. In these councils, it seems that the Baptists and Separatists mutually participated; little progress, however, was made in attempting to harmonize elements and principles so discordant. The most consummate wisdom of the ministry and church united, could not strike out a path in which principles and practices so diametrically opposite, could meet and harmonize. Nor is this astonishing. For *divine wisdom* had furnished none; and if *they* had succeeded in finding one, it must have been one of those by-paths of human invention, which always deviate more or less widely from the plain, straight path of gospel order and practice. The point at issue between the two parties seems to have been this. Those who did not feel themselves bound to receive immersion, demanded of their baptized brethren, and of the Baptist churches generally, that they should

acknowledge affusion, though received by them in infancy, as valid baptism. This of course they could not do, and hence a separation took place in many of these churches; the baptized members withdrawing and forming separate organizations, which soon assumed the exclusive character and standing of Baptist churches. Thus God in his providence was separating the wheat from the chaff, the truth from falsehood, the ordinances of his church from the traditions and commandments of men. Still, however, the leaven of error was not entirely purged out. The light, though shining somewhat more clearly than it had done, was nevertheless intercepted by much of prejudice and passion, and not as yet fully apprehended. So strong were the ties of former associations, that many at first could not separate themselves at the Lord's table, from those with whom they had been accustomed to walk in fellowship; and though they seem to have been fully aware of the inconsistency of this course, yet relative attachments triumphed at times over principle, and the truth was sacrificed, as it often is, at the shrine of human passion and friendship.

Still this was a point of peculiar tenderness, and was regarded and treated by the churches, with a degree of mildness and lenity somewhat remarkable, it is true, but not unbecoming, perhaps, the circumstances in which they were placed. The ministry of this period seem to have been endued with a remarkable degree of wisdom, prudence, and piety. They were men, evidently, whom God had selected and fitted for the weighty responsibilities and arduous work to which they were called; men who were able and willing to take the oversight of the church of God; to guide her amid the perils through which she was passing; to lead her up from the darkness in which she had long been wandering, into the full light and liberty of the gospel. Theirs was the responsible work of combining elements; of separating the precious from the vile; of discriminating between the true and the false, both in doctrine and practice; of collecting, arranging, fitting, and harmonizing materials for the establishment of the church of God, as the pillar and ground of the truth, upon the foundation of apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone.

They were called upon, not only to preserve the ordinance of baptism, which they had received in special trust, in its primitive relation to the church, but also to cast a mass of mind, just emerging from the darkness of a false theology, into the peculiar mould of gospel truth, into the form of sound evangelical sentiment, and of equally sound evangelical practice; and of the manner in which, under God, they met this responsibility; of the consummate wisdom, prudence, and fidelity, with which they discharged their high and sacred duties; of the correctness of their decisions in most matters of faith, practice, and discipline; the present condition of the denomination, is perhaps the best criterion. For it has advanced to its present state, guided and guarded by those simple principles of ecclesiastical economy, in which they so faithfully instructed the churches committed to their charge. And in no way, perhaps, has the wisdom of their successors in the ministry, been more happily exhibited, than in attempting no innovations concerning these important points of order in the church. Wherever an improvement has been attempted, it has most signally

failed; both individuals and churches have found themselves constrained to return, and retire within the prescribed limits of an *ecclesiastical fellowship, based upon union in the truth as it is in Jesus.* The reason of this is obvious. The light which guided our early ministry in the formation and discipline of the church, was the New Testament. This was their law, their canon, their rule of faith and action. They did not study the fathers, or the decrees of councils, or the decisions of synods, but the TEACHINGS OF JESUS CHRIST AND THE ACTS OF THE APOSTLES. Here they found the grand model of the christian church, or rather the christian church itself, as constituted and regulated under the immediate teachings of the Holy Ghost; and to this they strove in all things to conform the spiritual temple which they were called to rear. Hence under their hand the building rose with something of the simplicity and beauty of the apostolic church. It stood out before the world reflecting in all its prominent features of doctrines, ordinances, and discipline, the light of a pure, primitive christianity. Let it not be supposed, that our veneration for our fathers in the ministry is

excessive; we venerate them, because they venerated the New Testament; we follow them because they followed Christ. We speak of their religious principles because they were drawn fresh from the fountain of truth, the living oracles of God; we speak of their acts because they were conformable to the precepts of the gospel, and as such are worthy of our perpetual imitation. We admire their spirit, the elevated tone of their piety, their unwavering fidelity to truth, their strict and undeviating conscientiousness, their patient endurance of suffering, and their manly resistance of religious despotism. They were indeed extraordinary men, but were *made so* by the *grace of God;* by the peculiar circumstances into the midst of which they were thrown; by the responsibilities they were called to sustain; and above all by the sufferings, privations, and persecutions, which they were called to endure. That they were great men we do not claim, at least in the ordinary acceptation of this phrase; and yet, if purity of mind and character, deep and ardent piety, strong attachment to truth, correct and comprehensive views of the gospel, a thorough acquaintance with the

word of God; together with an ability in illustrating and applying the same, in an extraordinary degree successful in winning souls to Christ, as well as in edifying the church of God; if these qualifications in any degree constitute *true goodness*, and *true greatness*, then *were they* truly good and truly great men. They were men of a plain, common education, yet of strong, vigorous intellects, of sound practical sense; and thence brought to the study of the scriptures that peculiar artlessness and simplicity of mind so essential to a right understanding of the word of God. Books they had none. The Bible alone was the man of their counsel, their great and almost exclusive study; and hence they became mighty in the scriptures, thorough and correct expounders of the doctrines and precepts of the gospel.

They were unlearned in many of the modern modes of interpretation, untaught in many of the nice distinctions of a speculative theology, but were not therefore, we imagine, the *less evangelical* in their sentiments, the *less successful* in their ministrations.

They seem to have received the scriptures

in their most plain and obvious meaning, without seeking to conform them to their prejudices, or to bend them to the support of a denominational creed. Indeed they had no such creed; and if prejudice at any time they had, it was a prejudice consequent to, and dependent upon a diligent and prayerful study of the Bible, and might therefore be supposed to be in harmony with truth. Doubtless, like all other good men in similar circumstances, they were not aware of the greatness of the work they were performing, of the far-reaching influence of the principles which they had embraced, and were laboriously inculcating.

Hence the absence of all policy and design in their proceedings touching the future. They left truth where the apostles left it, not to be transmitted by means of creeds and heartless subscriptions, but to be handed down from generation to generation in the experience of those who should embrace it, trusting in God that the line of the true spiritual priesthood would continue unbroken, and the church thus be perpetuated to the end of time.

We are disposed, however, to trace all this to the superintending providence of God, to

the guardian influence of the Holy Spirit. To us it seems evident, that God, through the agency of these men, was preparing to give the world a practical illustration of *that great truth*, which the church has ever been so slow to learn, namely: that the *Bible understood*, the *Bible believed*, the *Bible loved*, the *Bible practiced*, is the *best*, the *only* safeguard to ecclesiastical purity.

We have thus sketched, with as much brevity as justice to the subject would permit, the history and character of the age that witnessed the rise and organization of this church. It remains for us now, to present in detail some of the most important facts and events of its own history.

The first record subsequent to that of the organization of the church, bears date of October 3d, 1762. It records a petition of the pastor to travel, and preach the gospel wherever God might open the way before him. The church gave him full liberty to go, and improve his gift wherever God should call him. The next record, of October 17th, 1764, is of a somewhat painful character. It describes, very briefly, a course of discipline which the church were

constrained to take with their pastor. The charges against him were as follows: first, that he had given occasion to the people to think that he was actuated by a hireling spirit, in demanding a stated salary for his services; and, second, that he professed to have an internal dismission from the church, and in virtue thereof pronounced the church dissolved. Touching the first charge, he plead guilty and confessed his error; but as to the second, he firmly maintained that his internal dismission from the church was from heaven. On the second day of November, 1764, the church, as the records state, after much labor, resolved to withdraw the hand of fellowship from their pastor. The ground of this was, that he persevered in declaring that the church was dissolved, and that he had an internal dismission from heaven. The next record, of October 3d, 1765, presents the doings of a council, called in relation to the case of elder Palmer. The names of the council were Nathan Avery, Timothy Whightman, Simeon Brown, Joseph Ayer, Richard Williams, Amos Burrows, Joshua Birch, Eliezer Brown. The doings of this council, furnish an interesting specimen of

the manner in which they transacted business of this character, in these early times. First, they offered prayer to Almighty God for direction; second, they inquired of the church for what purpose they had called them together; third, they proceeded to hear a relation of the matter from elder Palmer, and also a statement of facts from the church, after which they adjourned to a private dwelling, and came to a decision in the following manner: the moderator, probably elder Timothy Whightman, proposed to the council the following questions: first, had elder Palmer a right to withdraw from the church in the manner and form he did? answer in the negative. Second, has elder Palmer, by withdrawing from the church, rendered himself worthy of discipline? answer in the affirmative. They then proceeded to advise elder Palmer to reconsider his conduct, and admonished him in the following manner: 'Dear brother, is this agreeable to your ordination vows, and the solemn charge committed to you? If the church, as you say, was in a languishing condition, then where was your love; where your pity; where your faithfulness to God, to Christ the good

shepherd, to the sheep of his pasture and of your charge? We entreat you, in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, and in the bowels of love, that you repent and turn again to God, and to the church of your charge, lest a broken covenant and the blood of souls rise against you.' To the church they spake as follows: 'Dear brethren, our bowels move with compassion and sympathy towards you, while we behold you as sheep without a shepherd; but we trust the great Shepherd of the sheep will not forsake you. Cry after your elder, cry to God for him; who knows but God will restore him to you? We advise you, brethren, after you have wholly discharged your duty to him in this respect, and he continues incorrigible and impenitent, that you depose him of the ministry, and the charge committed to him in his ordination. Finally, brethren, farewell; the God of peace be with you. Amen.'

At a meeting held on the 25th of the same month, the church voted their concurrence with the doings of the council, and directed their clerk to send a copy of the same to Mr. Palmer. Still, however, the final act of exclusion was delayed, in hope, doubtless, that their pas-

tor, whom they seemed to have truly esteemed, might return to them; but in this they were disappointed. A letter is found on record, bearing date of January 9th, 1776, addressed to Mr. Palmer; in which, after reviewing the course of discipline pursued, they proceed to say: 'And now in covenant faithfulness to you, our once beloved elder, and in honor to the laws of God's house, we exclude you from our fellowship; and depose you from the pastoral office committed to you at your ordination.' We have copied these proceedings at length, because they furnish an interesting illustration of the principles of order and discipline by which this church, in its infancy, and the denomination in general, at this early period, were controlled. It proves that our churches at the beginning were well governed, well disciplined; that nothing like looseness of sentiment was permitted to obtain even in the ministry. It furnishes also an early precedent worthy of our special regard, showing the specific character and design of councils. This council was exclusively advisory. It attempted to exercise no authority over the church. It simply gave its advice and left the church

free to receive or reject it. It was convoked, not to *legislate*, but to *advise;* not because the *authority of the church was not adequate* to the *deposing* of a *minister;* but because the church, in a case perhaps unprecedented, at least of peculiar intricacy, felt the need of counsel; and we scarcely know which to admire most, the prudence of the church in asking advice, or the high and christian-like integrity of the council in giving it. Having performed *their duty*, the council dissolved, leaving the church to pursue an independent course of discipline with their offending pastor. The executive power was in the church, and having with the aid of a council ascertained the law of God's house in this case, they proceeded in due time to put it in execution. How unlike this was the discipline of the prevailing church of that period. Here is no dominant priesthood, 'lording it over God's heritage,' with the strong arm of civil power enforcing its decisions; no arrestments, fines, imprisonments, or whippings; but the church peaceably assembling from time to time, calmly deliberating upon a most important and trying case, calling to her aid the wisdom of an esteemed and intelligent

ministry, and finally proceeding, in the exercise of her high and independent prerogative, to put forth her decision of excommunication. This verily looks like the primitive order of Christ's kingdom. Here are no synods, no presbyteries, no councils invested with legislative power; but the church acknowledging no *head* but *Christ*, and *no law* but his *revealed word*, seeking with due caution and prudence to *ascertain* its decisions in a given case of discipline, and, having done so, faithfully executing the same.

Of Mr. Palmer's character little can be known, except what may be inferred from the record of these proceedings, and this we fear may be less favorable to him as a man, as a christian, as a minister, than strict justice would demand. From all we have been able to gather respecting him, we should judge him to have been a man of strong and fixed prejudices, immovable in his decisions, and somewhat austere and censorious in the exercise of his ministerial functions. He reproved with severity, and, without consulting consequences, followed out what he regarded as truth and duty. Still his piety seems to

have been of a mystical cast, which often, as in the case of his confession, led him to renounce as wrong, what was evidently right, and to hold as right, what was evidently wrong. In one respect it must be conceded, that he was in advance of the age, at least without doubt in advance of his church, namely, in relation to ministerial support. It is well known that the views of many of our earlier churches upon this subject were exceedingly defective. And the putting forth of such claims as Mr. Palmer seems to have urged, would be likely to produce a collision. Most of our members at this period came out from under the oppression of an overreaching ministry, and thence regarded with an undue jealousy, whatever might have the appearance of this evil.* No record was kept of the members received under the ministry of Mr. Palmer. We cannot, therefore, judge very correctly of its comparative worth. It, however, embraced a period of twenty-two years, and was, in this respect, at least, worthy the imitation of the ministry of the present day. I cannot pass from this

* See Appendix, letter A.

connection, without remarking, that the pastoral relation of this period, seems to have been regarded as peculiarly sacred. Both the church and the ministry viewed it as a permanent, and in ordinary cases as a changeless relation. They knew nothing of that system of trade and speculation in the ministry, in which the churches have of late years so extensively engaged. And the ministry knew as little of that ambitiousness of place and station, which at the present time is one of its most unlovely features. Mr. Palmer, in the early part of his ministry, travelled somewhat extensively, penetrating the adjoining towns and counties, preaching the gospel wherever God in his providence opened the way before him. He seems to have labored with some degree of success in the town of Tolland, and while there, baptized the celebrated Shubael Stearns, and shortly after assisted in his ordination. This was about the year 1751. In 1764, he also baptized Simeon Brown, the first pastor of the Second Baptist Church in this town.* From all these circumstances, it may, we

* See Appendix, letter B.

think, be fairly inferred, that Mr. Palmer was a man of no small moral worth, notwithstanding the unhappy termination of his ministry. We are disposed to regard the whole subject in the most favorable light on his part, to do justice to his character, and to relieve, if possible, the darkness in which the latter part of his life was shrouded. Whether he was restored to the church cannot be determined, for the records are again broken till 1781, before which time, doubtless, the aged man had gone to his reward.

Still, as the first pastor of this church, as exercising his ministry in a period which tried men's souls, as laboring extensively for the diffusion of truth, as a faithful coadjutor with our earliest ministers in the great work of gathering and planting our churches, as having baptized and assisted in the ordination of two men of such eminent worth, we are constrained to reverence his name and memory, and regard him as worthy to be enrolled among those noble men with whom he was sometime associated. He doubtless had to struggle with many embarrassments of a pecuniary character. A large proportion of his time was

devoted to the work of the ministry, and with the scanty allowances furnished him by his church, it was but natural that he should become discouraged and unhappy, in his official connection. His great error, after all, seems to have been one, which, at that time, was quite prevalent in these parts, namely, that internal impressions were decisive in all matters of duty and discipline. The church and council doubtless acted wisely in purging out this delusion; but the church was sadly behind its duty in not giving its pastor a comfortable support. Had this been done cheerfully, the connection might possibly have continued unbroken and happy until his death. Mr. Palmer was succeeded in his ministry by Mr. Eliezer Brown, a member and licentiate of the Second Church in Stonington. In this capacity, he seems to have served this church for the term of four years. He became a member of this church, 1769, and was ordained its pastor, January 24th, 1770. The ministers who assisted, were Joshua Morse,* Nathan Avery, Timothy Whightman, Simeon Brown,

* See Appendix, letter C.

and Solomon Sprague. Mr. Brown entered upon his ministry under circumstances somewhat discouraging; the church was in a scattered, languishing condition; yet his call to the pastorate seems to have been unanimous, and he was thence successful in gathering and uniting the scattered sheep. Indeed he seems to have been a man whom God had eminently fitted for the station he was to occupy; and he came to his work at a time when his services were greatly needed. We cannot forbear to notice, in this connection, the prudence and deliberation with which the church proceeded in the choice and call of a pastor, as well as the becoming modesty and patience with which the candidate *awaited* that choice, and his consequent call to ordination. A period of four years is permitted to elapse between the dismission of their first pastor, and the final choice and settlement of his successor. During all this time, the young candidate preaches to the church. The church watch his steady demeanor, his ripening gifts, his growing worth; an attachment commences; they become convinced of his soundness in the faith, and of his ability to expound to them

and their children, the word of God. This lays a foundation for a connection between the pastor and people, of a long and happy continuance; and under ordinary circumstances, as in this case, to be dissolved only by death. Here is nothing of that haste and rashness in the choice of a pastor, which marks the decisions of many of our churches at the present day; and nothing of that prematureness of ordinations, under the burden of which, the denomination at this moment groans.

The ministry of Mr. Brown embraces a period of twenty-five years. The first years of his ministry do not appear to have been distinguished, by any unusual success in the enlargement of the church. From 1770 to 1781, there is an entire blank in the records, about which no definite information can be obtained. In 1784, according to a manuscript copy of the minutes of the Stonington Union Association,* the church numbered ninety-seven. From this period down to the year 1791 – 2, the additions by baptism were few. The ministry, about this time, was much engaged in adjust-

* See Appendix, letter D.

ing the affairs of the denomination in general; in regulating the practice of the churches, touching their ecclesiastical fellowship; in settling questions of discipline, &c. &c. Councils were frequent, and the pastor, deacons, and more prominent members, were frequently called away; still, during all this period, strict discipline was evidently maintained, and the church lived in peace and harmony. The office of deacon at this time was filled by Mr. Allen Breed. He was probably among the earliest members of the church, and perhaps was chosen to the office at its organization. From all that can be gathered concerning him, he seems to have been a good man, and to have filled the office of a deacon well. Oct. 6, 1784, Nathan Randall, was chosen deacon, and on the 8th of December following, was publicly ordained. In August, 1785, Reuben Palmer was set apart to the work of an evangelist.* From this date to 1788, nothing occurs of special interest. A few scattered notices of baptisms, together with the ordinary cases of discipline, is all that appears on the

* See Appendix, letter E.

records. From the published minutes* of the association, we learn that in 1789, the church numbered one hundred and two. The year 1790 brings us towards the close of Mr. Brown's ministry. He had scattered long the seed of truth, and as yet had gathered but little fruit; but the promise of God cannot fail; His word cannot return to him void. It had been faithfully preached, and must accomplish the thing whereunto it is sent. The seed had been sown and could not be lost; bread had been scattered upon the waters, and after many days, it must be found. Accordingly, in the year 1791, Mr. Brown began to witness the fulfilment of these promises.

We may well suppose that he was often discouraged, and left to exclaim, in the language of the prophet, 'Who hath believed our report?' His ministry is drawing to a close, and the good man almost concludes, that he must be gathered to his fathers, without beholding the salvation of God. But not so; at this advanced period of his life, the faithful minister receives the commission, 'Thrust

* See Appendix, letter F.

in thy sickle and reap, for the harvest is fully ripe.' This year, 1791, they enjoyed a little refreshing; the Lord began to set them free. The year following, the heavens dropped down fatness; the clouds had long been gathering, and now poured down a 'plentiful rain, whereby God's inheritance was confirmed when weary.' In this revival, the church received an accession of fifty-two, making its whole number, one hundred and fifty-two. This revival, in its steady progress, was evidently in harmony, with the age in which it occurred. Society then was not made up of tinder, steam, and vapor, but of solid granite, and consequently, was not easily moved. But when taken by grace from the quarry of nature, and placed in the great spiritual temple, it lay perhaps the more firmly upon the foundation. It had at least sufficient weight of character, to settle and ground it in the truth. If the temple did not gather to itself so many lively stones, they were perhaps more massive, better polished and fitted, by a long preparatory course of labor, for the place they were to occupy. Men did not then understand the process of reducing solid rock to gas, and of

blowing it off in vapor; but the present age, in its advanced light and knowledge, understands all this. The mighty agencies of nature are brought under its control; and why not a corresponding improvement, in controlling the agencies of grace? Why not bring so much spiritual light, and heat, and power, to bear upon the world, as to melt away at once its flinty hardness and icy coldness?

Such is the *philosophy* of some men. But the voice of inspiration is, 'Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit, saith the Lord.' Doubtless religious revivals will be in some measure conformable to the peculiarities of the period, in which they occur. But we hold it to be a *great* and *fundamental truth*, that, in whatever age or under whatever possible circumstances occurring, pure revivals are always produced by the *sovereign, independent, uncontrolled power of the Holy Ghost.* Such was the faith of the fathers of the Baptist church; and the revivals which occurred under their ministry, were instrumentally developed by preaching based upon this foundation, and moulded into this peculiar form of doctrine.

October 25, 1792, Peleg Randall was ordain-

ed an evangelist. He was baptized November 19th, 1784. On this occasion, the pastor of this church with much propriety gave the charge. Thus the mantle of Elijah, falls upon Elisha. The old pastor, worn with long labor, is about to be taken up to his reward; but ere he departs he must pour the sacred oil upon the head of his succesor. He must call him from following the plough to assist him in the duties of his infirm and declining age, and thus prepare him, when he shall have departed, 'to feed the flock of God, and take the oversight thereof.' This was the *old way* of teaching divinity to the rising ministry, and it was surely an *excellent*, if not the *more excellent* way.

In April, 1794, Nathan Chapman was ordained deacon. This year, also, the association held its twenty-second anniversary with this church. On the last day of the session, Abel Brown, a member of this church, was ordained to the work of the ministry. The right hand of fellowship was given by the aged pastor. These were among the last acts of his life. God was dealing with him in mercy, leading him gently and pleasantly down to the tomb. He had seen the salvation of God; laid his hands upon the

head of his successor; had met the churches in convocation at his own place of worship; and now what remained but that he should depart in peace. Accordingly, on the 20th of June, 1795, he fell asleep in Jesus. Mr. Brown was possessed of but little education, yet of strong native powers, of vivid thought and conception, and of a flowing, rapid delivery. He was justly esteemed as among the most eminent of the preachers of his day. There are a few, still lingering among us, who remember him well; who in the days of their youth sat under the last part of his ministry; but they are fast retiring like the aged trees of the forest, and soon, the last of this fraternity, will have been numbered with the dead.

Mr. Brown was succeeded in the pastoral office by Peleg Randall. Mr. Randall, as a preacher, was very much unlike his predecessor. His talent was not, like *his*, popular and attractive. His discourses were cool, deliberate, instructive, but were usually wanting in the glowing warmth and animation, for which his revered predecessor was so highly distinguished. Nevertheless he was at times impassioned, ardent, and impressive in his delivery; often

becoming, towards the close of his discourse, deeply moved himself, and thence deeply moving others. His ministry was much occupied in matters of discipline. The church had become somewhat enlarged, embracing a wide extent of territory, requiring much diligence and care, on the part of a pastor, to take the oversight of such a flock. Whether Mr. Randall was more strict in discipline than Mr. Brown, we cannot say; but it is certain that the records, during the period of his ministry, give evidence of a commendable fidelity in this respect. Although no general revival was enjoyed under his ministry, yet it was by no means unfruitful in the conversion of souls. The church was gradually increased from year to year. His ministry, like his character, was distinguished by no remarkable elevations or depressions; a steady, onward movement, if not rapid, yet sure, characterized alike both the pastor and his people. It is delightful to observe the permanency of the pastoral relation of these times, and the reciprocal affection by which it was sustained. A pastor once settled, there was no thought of change, unless called for by the special voice of providence. Here is a

long and peaceful union of twenty-three years; the pastor going in and out before his people, from Sabbath to Sabbath; the youth coming up under his watchful care, till he comes to be regarded as a father in Israel; and the words of truth, as they drop from his lips, are esteemed as the oracles of God. Mr. Randall closed his labors with this church, October 8, 1813, and soon after removed to the state of New York. His person, character, and manner of preaching, are fresh in the memory of many now before me. He was respected and loved by all who knew him.

In 1813, the church found itself destitute of a spiritual guide. It, however, did not continue long in this condition. God, in his providence, was arranging circumstances, to lead them to the choice of the man whom he had anointed to this work. In January, 1814, they received a request from the First Church in Groton, to appoint delegates to assist in the ordination of Jonathan Miner. The ordination accordingly took place, February, 1814; and on the 12th of the same month, the church resolved to call him to preach to them for one year. The call was accepted, and Mr. Miner took up

his residence with them the following spring. His labors were immediately followed by a precious revival. During the first month of his ministry, between thirty and forty were admitted to the church by baptism; and within the period of three months, fifty-six were baptized. This, for the times, was a very extraordinary accession. There were then no protracted meetings; no special efforts to secure a revival, otherwise than as they were called forth, under the special enkindlings of the Holy Spirit in the bosoms of christians. *Then* the cloud of the divine presence went *before* the congregation, and the church *followed*, and pitched her tent wherever that cloud rested. Revivals then usually originated in this way: christians would be quickened in an unusual degree, under the preaching of the gospel; a few, at first, would begin to realize deeply their obligations to God, and to be burdened in spirit, for the salvation of sinners; and would pour out their souls, in warm and thrilling exhortations, following up the preaching of their pastor, with earnest appeals to the impenitent. Immediately succeeding this state of feeling in the church, a general seriousness

would be observed, especially in the youthful part of the community. The usual gayeties attendant upon this period of life, would be laid aside; the house of prayer would become the place of resort; and then the downcast look, the falling tear, the half suppressed sigh, would plainly indicate the presence of the Holy Spirit; and from such a period, the work would generally move on with increasing power, 'till as many as were ordained to eternal life believed.'

Many of the present members of this church, were gathered in, from this revival. By *them*, it will never be forgotten; and they will never fail to cherish an affectionate remembrance of him, who was the instrument in leading their youthful hearts to Christ. Thus, at the very commencement, God manifested his approbation of the choice of the church, by crowning the first efforts of their pastor, with abundant success. The beginning, however, is but a specimen of the entire course of his ministry. Revival follows upon revival, up to its close. True, there were years of comparative unfruitfulness. This of course must take place in a parish like this, where there is little change of

the inhabitants, and where the same families reside year after year. At the close of 1814, the church numbered one hundred and eighty-five. *

The next general revival, under the ministry of Mr. Miner, commenced in the autumn of 1822. The record of baptisms commences with September 28th, and extends to April 6th, 1823. Most of the members, now in the meridian of life, were received in this revival. Its hallowed seasons of prayer, its baptisms and communions, are still in fresh and sweet remembrance. Then we often sang, as we still sing, when our thoughts wander back to this bright and happy period,

> 'Jesus sought me when a stranger
> Wandering from the fold of God.'

With many of us, these were the days of childhood. But they left an impression upon our hearts which I trust neither time nor eternity will ever efface. It was the first bright spot in our existence, the enkindling of the spiritual life within us, the lighting up in our young, yet benighted minds, of the hope of immortality.

* See Appendix, letter G.

Of the numerous subjects of this work, the greater part remain until the present time, but some have fallen asleep.* By this revival the church received an accession of fifty-one members, making the whole number two hundred and thirty-one.

February 14th, 1824, deacon Nathan Chapman died, having been a faithful member of the church, forty years. He came like a shock of corn fully ripe to the harvest. Of him it may truly be said, that he 'used the office of a deacon well, purchased to himself a good degree and great boldness in the faith.' He was succeeded in the deaconship by his son, Smith Chapman, who was ordained May 18th, 1826.†

In October, 1828, another awakening commenced, and continued through the following winter. It was not, however, as extensive as the one preceding it. Twenty-seven were added by baptism.

In 1830, the old house in which the fathers first worshipped having become dilapidated, and in many respects inconvenient, the present neat and commodious house was erected

* See Appendix, letter H. † See Appendix, letter I.

and dedicated, to the service of Almighty God, with appropriate religious exercises. The sermon was preached by elder John Gano Whightman.

In the latter part of the summer of 1831, another revival commenced, from which twenty-five were gathered into the church, making the aggregate number two hundred and thirty-two. We have now come down to the close of Mr. Miner's ministry, as the pastor of this church. It terminated March 15th, 1834, embracing a period of twenty years; and, though briefer than either of his predecessors', yet it appears long, when placed by the side of our modern system of pastoral itinerancy. From its rise up to this period, the church had enjoyed, from year to year, the steady, unbroken ministrations of the pastoral office. During ninety-one years it had but four pastors, and under their labors, had advanced from a state of the most extreme feebleness, to comparative strength and prosperity.*

The ministry of Mr. Miner, compared with that of his predecessors, was very successful.

* See Appendix, letter J.

This may have arisen, partly from the increase of population, and partly from a more general diffusion of a revival spirit in the churches, towards the close of his labors.

His preaching, however, especially as embracing a compass of twenty years, was very effective. His discourses were rich in doctrinal, experimental, and practical truth, commingled and combined, in a manner unusually interesting and instructive. In his doctrinal views, he was thoroughly evangelical, and, like his predecessors, decidedly calvinistic. His sermons were often marked by a range of thought, and strength of sentiment, truly astonishing in a man of so limited literary advantages. It hence required close attention, at times, to follow him; and on this account he was regarded by some as dry and uninteresting, but to the attentive, thinking hearer he was always instructive.

That he had imperfections, is doubtless more than probable; but even these were constitutional, rather than moral, occasional, rather than habitual. He was subject to a depression of mind, which induced a distrustfulness, painful in the extreme to himself, and sometimes

embarrassing to his brethren. But from this, he would soon recover, and exhibit his wonted cheerfulness and usual good nature. 'He was a good man, strong in the faith,' at times 'full of the Holy Ghost,' and under his ministry 'much people were added to the Lord.'

The year following the dismission of Mr. Miner, the church enjoyed another season of refreshing; forty-five were received by baptism. During the years 1834, 1835, 1836, and 1837, the church was destitute of a pastor.

In the autumn of 1837 another awakening commenced, and as the fruit of it forty precious souls were gathered into the fold of Christ. In the absence of a pastor during these years, 'the oversight of the flock' devolved chiefly upon the deacons, namely, Samuel Peabody and Smith Chapman; and of the fidelity, with which they met this responsibility, the prosperity of the church, while under their care, is the best proof. During the year 1838, the pulpit was supplied by Rev. Benjamin N. Harris; in 1839 by Rev. Cyrus Miner. April 1st, 1840, Rev. Charles Randall became the pastor of the church; under his ministry during this year, thirty-six were added by baptism.

During the year 1842, Mr. Randall being absent, the pulpit was chiefly supplied by Rev. William Flint. Under his ministry, thirty-five were admitted to the church by baptism.* June 17th, of this year, 1843, Mr. Randall returned and resumed the pastoral charge.

We have thus taken a hasty glance at the history of this church. Commencing with its rise, one hundred years ago, we have followed it in its progress down to the present time. We have seen it small at first, struggling with popular prejudice, proscribed by the civil law; yet rising and gaining strength, under the pressure of all this opposition.

We have marked its steady, onward course, as we have travelled down through succeeding generations, till at length we find, that the leaven of truth, hid a century since, in a few faithful hearts, has widely diffused itself throughout community, and is still on every side extending. How marked the difference between that period and this. Then the church sought the protection of the state, and the state assumed to be the guardian of chris-

* See Appendix, letter L.

tianity. But now the church claims alliance alone with her great SPIRITUAL HEAD, lives, advances, triumphs, 'not by might nor by power,' but by the indwelling 'Spirit of God.' Then christian *baptism* was scarcely known in these parts, or known only to meet with persecution from the prevailing church. Now it prevails to a great extent in all denominations, and multitudes are buried every year in the likeness of the Savior's death. Then there was but one Baptist church in this town, two in this county, and but three or four in this state. Now there are in this town, five Baptist churches, and in the state, one hundred and eight. Then Pædobaptism everywhere prevailed; now it is rapidly passing away. Then a few scattered churches of our faith, were found in Massachusetts, Rhode Island, Connecticut, and New Jersey. Now they are everywhere found embracing the largest population of either of the prevailing denominations in the United States. We speak not of this boastingly; as a denomination we have nothing whereof to glory.

Our fathers simply preached and practiced the truth, and left it to work its own way and

win its own triumphs; and in proportion as men have ventured to read and think for themselves; in proportion as the authority of the New Testament has prevailed over the authority of the church and the ministry; in that proportion have the distinctive sentiments of the Baptist church been embraced.

The great question now to be settled, is the same which has ever been pending: whether God, or man, shall be supreme; whether human, or divine authority shall be regarded; whether the word of God, or the word of man, shall be authoritative; whether GOD shall legislate for the church, or the *church legislate* for *herself.*

This question has all along agitated the world; and will continue to do so, till christians, casting off all alliance with vain traditions received from *the fathers*, come fully to the Bible and bow to its authority. The light which a portion of the evangelical church has refused to receive, because reflected from a point repulsive to its sectional prejudices, it will nevertheless be constrained to follow, or strike hands with those who deny the exclusive authority of the Bible in points of faith

and practice, and wander back amid the labyrinths of human traditions to Rome itself.

God hasten the day, when we shall all come to the unity of the faith, 'having one LORD, one FAITH, one BAPTISM, one God and Father of all, who is above all and in all.'

In view of the past, we are led to exclaim, 'what hath God wrought!' Surely he that is mighty, hath done marvellous things. His mercy is on them that fear him, from generation to generation. He hath showed strength with his arm; he hath scattered the proud, in the imagination of their hearts; he hath put down the mighty from their seats, and exalted them of low degree.

The history of this church illustrates the efficiency of our peculiar form of government. That government is strictly congregational — *strictly independent.* Each church controls itself, administers its own discipline, receives and excludes its own members, chooses and calls to ordination its own pastors; disciplines, dismisses, and *deposes* them by its own independent authority. It *may* ask the advice of other churches, but is not *bound to do so.* It may convoke a council, *for counsel,* but for noth-

ing further. The executive power is in the church; the discipline must be its own, and from its decisions, there can be no legitimate appeal. The voice of a majority of the *male members* of a Baptist church, must, in all cases of discipline, be decisive.

Such, at least, are the principles, by which this church, in its government, has ever been controlled; and few churches, it is believed, during the same number of years, have enjoyed more internal quietness and harmony.

In closing, we can but remark, that we are forcibly reminded of the extreme brevity of life; of the transitory nature of all earthly relations, religious, as well as social and domestic. 'The fathers, where are they? and the prophets, do they live forever?' The peculiar services and associations of this day answer no. The children and the children's children are here; but the fathers with their whitened locks, and the prophets with their hoary heads, where are they? Alas, with but a few exceptions, they are gone, all gone. But a few years since they were here, meeting the high responsibilities, and discharging the important duties which we this morning have

Soon we with them shall have passed away. Another century will have rolled by; another congregation will be here gathered, and other lips will be employed in detailing the history of this church through another ONE HUNDRED YEARS.

What the commencement of that history shall be, is put within your power, my brethren, to determine. Standing as you do at the opening of another century in your history, will you not lift up your hearts to the God of your fathers, and say, in the language of inspiration, 'Let thy work appear unto thy servants, and thy glory unto their children, and let the beauty of the Lord our God be upon us, and establish thou the work of our hands upon us, yea the work of our hands, establish thou it?'

APPENDIX.

A.

An anecdote has come down to us, which may throw some light upon the different views, entertained by the pastor and people, on this point. It was the custom of this church, it seems, though opposed to paying a stated salary, to assist their minister, by making him presents of grain and other necessaries of life. On a certain time, one of the brethren, not wholly unmindful of his duty in this respect, laded his beast with wheat, and proceeded to the house of his pastor. But the good pastor, who, in this instance, at least, seems to have been more nice than wise, replied, that he could not receive it as a gift, but would take it if it might be regarded as his due; whereupon the brother, with as little regard to charity as the pastor had to policy, abruptly turned homewards, carrying back with him his wheat. It is not strange, that such austerity of principle and manners, on both sides, should have produced unpleasant collisions.

B.

Mr. Brown, though unbaptized, had for a number of years been a deacon of the open communion

Baptist church in Westerly, R. I., under the pastoral care of Stephen Babcock. They walked together in harmony for some years, till a division arose in the church, about what was then called the divine testimony; the pastor and a certain portion of the church maintaining, that all questions of discipline were to be settled by certain impulses and impressions, and the deacon with the other party, maintaining that such questions were to be decided by the word of God and moral evidence. The spirit of delusion, however, in regard to the divine testimony, prevailed; and deacon Brown, with his adherents, withdrew and formed the Second Baptist Church in this town.

C.

The life and times of Joshua Morse, are intimately connected with the early history of this church. The year following its constitution, we find him preaching in this town, with evident tokens of the divine approbation; yet encountering strong opposition from the clergy of the established order. Though a youth, his ministry seems to have been distinguished by the strength and manliness of riper years. His manner is said to have been unusually commanding and impressive, and warmed with such a glow of feeling, as often to dissolve his congregation in tears. Zealous, ardent, impassioned, bring-

ing to his ministry the freshness of religious experience, with a heart burning for the conversion of souls, it is not strange, that the people flocked to hear the gospel from his lips. Nor is it strange, that the jealousy of the dominant ministry was excited, or that the arm of persecution was stretched out, when we remember the character of that ministry, both in its civil and religious relations. On the one hand, it was sentimentally opposed to evangelical piety, and on the other, from its alliance with the state, it felt itself called upon to resist all innovations upon the established forms of worship. It was, perhaps, as pure as a ministry could be, associated as it was with the state; as little inclined to persecution, as any ministry would be, which might, if it would, bring to its support, the power and penalty of law. Still it is historically true, that it was strongly opposed to evangelical doctrine, and experimental religion. Men were then educated for the *ministry* as a *profession*, without a previous preparation of heart, and call thereto, by the Holy Ghost. It is not strange, therefore, that spirituality languished. What little was still living, lived in the bosoms of the older members, who had enjoyed the benefits of a purer ministry. The rising generation was coming up, destitute of all experimental and practical piety, and what was worse, was coming into the church in this state.

In this state of things, it is but natural to suppose,

that the lighting up of the flame of a glorious revival, would produce a concussion in the religious atmosphere, and wake into collision, the great antagonist principles of moral truth and falsehood.

Mr. Morse was among the number of those faithful pioneers, who shared most largely, in the trials and sufferings of this great religious conflict. Stonington appears to have been the field of his earliest labors, as it certainly was of his earliest sufferings. At that time, this was the only Baptist church in this town. It is hence more than probable, that he often preached to this people. There was also a small meeting-house, located a few miles north of the village of Pawcatuc, where the Baptists and Separates were accustomed to unite in worship. These were dark and troublous times, when the little flock of Christ, persecuted by the nominal church, were constrained to seek out for themselves a retreat, where they might build their altars, and offer up their spiritual sacrifices of praise to God. Here, we are told, these faithful *men of God* were accustomed to deliver their messages of grace, with that *unction* so peculiar to the evangelical ministry of that day.

The preaching of Mr. Morse in Stonington, was attended with success; a revival of religion in the vicinity of this church was in progress, when he was arrested and carried before the magistrate. While the trial was pending, the wife of the magis-

trate, is said to have besought him with tears, not to give judgment against so innocent and holy a man; but the influence of the clergy, and the clamors of a set of bigoted gentry, who declared that his preaching was not according to law, prevailed; and he was sentenced to pay a fine of twenty shillings, or receive ten lashes at the whipping post. The fine he could not pay, and he was taken to the place of punishment; but while the constable was preparing to inflict the stripes, Mr. Morse is said to have addressed him thus: 'Well, my friend, I suppose you must do your duty, but remember that when you strike me, you strike one of God's dear children.' The simplicity and tenderness with which he spoke, drew tears from the stout-hearted man, and he refused to execute the barbarous penalty, pronounced the law unjust, reproached the court for cruelty, and with a truly noble generosity, paid the fine, and released the innocent sufferer.

On another occasion, as he was preaching, a clergyman came in, put his hand upon his mouth, and commanded a man who accompanied him to strike him.

At another time, while preaching in the south part of the town, two men rushed in, and with violent blows brought him to the floor. When he had recovered a little, he looked upon them, and said, 'My friends, if you die natural deaths, the Lord hath not spoken by me.' The word of the Lord was not in vain. Both perished in the deep.

At another time, while engaged in prayer, he was knocked down, dragged by the hair down a flight of steps into the street, and was there beaten in the most inhuman manner. A gash on his face was laid open so deep, that he carried the scar to his grave.

On another occasion, the house where he was preaching, was surrounded by a gang of the elite and fashionable of the town, who had bound themselves by an oath that they would kill him whenever he came out. His wife and friends entreated him with tears, not to commit himself to the infuriated rabble. But he replied, 'what mean ye to weep and to break my heart!' Accordingly, he went out, and finding the mob armed with clubs, he lifted up his hands and began to pray for his enemies. The result was, they were confounded and subdued, and some, convinced of their wickedness in persecuting so good a man, begged his pardon and retired.

We speak not of these things in this place to enkindle resentment, much less to excite an unholy prejudice, towards any portion of the existing evangelical church; but as matters of history; as incidents full of interest to ourselves, and of instruction to others.

It is surely a matter of no small importance to *us* to *know minutely* these incidents of our early history—these sufferings, through which our fathers passed, in procuring for us, the high immunities of religious

freedom, in transmitting to us in their purity the precious doctrines and ordinances of the gospel.

They were engaged in a mighty struggle with a *dominant*, but *nominal* church. They fought the battle well, achieved a glorious victory, and we enjoy the fruits. But let us never forget that the weapons of their warfare were *spiritual*, and were, therefore, mighty through God, to the pulling down of the strong holds of Satan, both in church and state. It was by a simple 'manifestation of the truth, commending themselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God,' that they obtained these splendid victories. 'Through *faith* they overcame the world, wrought righteousness, obtained promises, out of weakness were made strong, waxed valiant in fight, and turned to flight the armies of the aliens.'

In despite of all opposition, Mr. Morse continued his labors in this town with great success; the truth prevailed, converts were multiplied, and the feeble church was strengthened and increased.

D.

In 1782, is found the first record of the appointment of messengers to the Association. Yet, as appears from the manuscript minutes of that body, it held its fifth annual session with this church, October 2d, 1775.

The association was formed in Lyme, October

7th, 1772. At its session in 1775, in Groton, the pastor of this church was chosen moderator. The primary design of the association, seems to have been to settle certain existing difficulties, and to unite the churches, upon some general principles of faith and discipline. Hence at their first session they recommended to the churches, to adopt the English Baptist confession of faith, and the minutes of the following year show, that it was generally complied with.

They say as follows: The delegates made returns, that the churches generally acquiesced in the doings of the last association, namely: *not to covenant and build with Congregational members that hold to the practice of infant sprinkling, nor to commune with them at the Lord's table;* and also to adopt the English Baptist articles.

In the minutes of the same year the following record is found: 'Some mention was made that elder Eliezer Brown, had a member in his church that communed with those who were only sprinkled for baptism, which was a grief to the association, and they requested elder Brown, to let his church know, that they requested a reformation in this matter.' Yet no notice is found of this, in the records of the church. It was doubtless an exception to their general practice, though it is by no means certain, that the church did not, during a few of the first years of its existence, allow this *mixed communion.*

E.

Mr. Palmer at this time, resided in Preston, and maintained public worship in his own house. He gathered a small congregation, baptized a number of individuals, who placed themselves under the watch care of this church. There is now in Preston a flourishing Baptist church.

F.

It is interesting to notice the doings of the associations of these times, as they throw light upon the prevailing sentiments of the churches, relative to many interesting questions.

In the minutes of this year, the twelfth item is as follows. In answer to a question proposed by Joshua Morse, respecting the validity of baptism, administered by a person who had never been himself baptized, nor yet ordained, it was replied, that under the present circumstances of the church, such baptism is deemed null and void. In 1790, the association met with the Second Baptist Church in this town. The introductory sermon was preached by the venerable Isaac Backus, from 1 Samuel, xxii. 1, 2.

G.

In October, 1816, the legislature of Connecticut passed an act entitled an act for the support of litera-

ture and religion; the design of which was, to distribute to the various sects, a certain amount of surplus revenue.

February 1st, 1817, as the records state, the church met for the purpose of expressing their opinion concerning this act, and, after some consultation, unanimously agreed in disapproving it; and passed several resolutions, which were forwarded for publication to one or more of the public newspapers in this state. The law went into effect. But this church, true to the great principles of our ecclesiastical policy, resisting with a becoming jealousy all overtures from the civil power, persevered in their hostility to the act.

Hence, March 11th, 1820, the church and society met and passed the following resolution. Resolved, that we do not wish to receive our part of the money granted to the Baptist denomination by the legislature of this state.

We admire this stern integrity, this indomitable fidelity to the great principles of religious purity and freedom. This church knew too well, the baneful effects of state patronage, to be tempted into so unholy an alliance. The history of her early sufferings therefrom was not entirely forgotten, and though there might be no *apparent*, no *real* danger, yet would she not be *tempted* to violate in practice one of the most vital principles of her religious constitution.

H.

We cannot forbear to mention in this place, the name of Ralph I. Brown. He was baptized September 29th, 1822. He early devoted himself to the work of the ministry; had entered upon a course of study; when his life was suddenly terminated, October 27th, 1833. The particulars of his brief life, and of his happy, triumphant death, have been sketched with vivid truthfulness, in a little volume by the Rev. Bradley Miner.

I.

It has always been the custom of this church in the ordination of deacons, to have them examined by a council, concerning their religious experience, views of doctrine, &c. &c. &c. Nor can we regard this as unnecessary. The office of a deacon is *responsible*, *influential*, *important*, and men ought by no means to be admitted to it, of whose soundness in the faith, we have not the most satisfactory proof. It is believed, that one prolific source of difficulty in our churches, is to be found in the hasty, informal admission of men to this responsible station.

If anywhere in the church, we need men of strong minds, clear heads, and *good hearts*, we need them here. It has thus far been the good fortune of this church to have men of this stamp in this office.

J.

MINISTERS WHO HAVE BELONGED TO THIS CHURCH.

WAIT PALMER,	Pastor	22	years.
ELIEZER BROWN,	do.	25	do.
PELEG RANDALL,	do.	23	do.
ABEL PALMER,			
CHRISTOPHER PALMER,			
REUBEN PALMER,			
ABEL BROWN,			
JONATHAN MINER,	do.	20	do.
GERSHOM PALMER,			
PAUL MAIN,			
BENJAMIN N. HARRIS,	do.	1 1-2	do.
CYRUS MINER,	do.	1	do.
ALBERT G. PALMER,	do.	1	do.
CHARLES RANDALL,	do.	1	do.
WILLIAM FLINT,	do.	1	do.

K.

The Deacons who have served the church, are as follows:

ALLEN BREED,
NATHAN RANDALL,
NATHAN CHAPMAN,
SAMUEL PEABODY,
SMITH CHAPMAN,
REUBEN CHAPMAN,
AARON THOMPSON,
SANFORD MAIN,
PAUL GREEN.

The last four are the present deacons.

L.

SPECIAL AWAKENINGS.

1792.	52,	baptized by	Mr. Brown.
1814.	56,		
1822.	51,	"	Mr. Miner.
1828.	27,		
1831.	25,		
1834.	45,	"	No Pastor.
1837.	40,		
1840.	36,	"	Mr. Randall.
1842.	35,	"	Mr. Flint.

M.

The following individuals are supposed to have been among the first members of the church. Their names are found in the old deed of the lot of land upon which their first meeting-house was built.

JONATHAN BIRCH,
JOSHUA HOLMES,
THOMAS MAINE,
JOSHUA RATHBUN,
WILLIAM PALMER.

The lot was given by DANIEL BROWN and THOMAS HOLMES.